

## [Here We Can Be Glad #6]

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HERE WE CAN BE GLAD New Hampshire

### Chapter 6

The best Christmas that Katherine and her family ever had was in 1927. By then they were in a roomy tenement, they had garden space on Pine Island and Jan not only had full time work but [?] was good. Charlotte was 8 years old, Frances 6 and Henry a baby.

About a month before Christmas Katherine had taken Frances with her to a spot she knew on Pine Island. There they had gathered wild cherry branches. Charlotte had been good about staying with the baby, so they let her put the branches in water. They all took good care of these branches, saw that they had sun, plenty of water and were in a warm place. This care brought what they wished, blossoms. A few days before Christmas the first ones appeared. So this Christmas they would have cherry blossoms!

During the summer and fall Jan had gathered mushrooms. These were strung and dried. As there were was a goodly lot they would have plenty of mushrooms for the Christmas [barszcz?] or soup.

In the corner of the main room was a shook of grain. The tree was up and hung with edibles, nuts, apples, pears, also colored paper and decorated egg-shells.

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The wafers, oplatki, had been obtained from the priest. These had been blessed by him and would be eaten before the supper. Oblong in shape, very thin, they carried a distinct impression of the nativity.

A bundle of straw was in the kitchen waiting to be used.

Now It is the day before Christmas. Altho Katherine has been preparing for this day for the past two weeks, still there is plenty to do.

They fast all day, except Katherine and the baby she nurses.

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Even she eats very little.

Ever since the tree was set up presents have been placed beneath it. Until now, the accumulation is quite impressive. They all The girls help to set the table. Straw is first spread on the table then covered with the cloth. A soup plate, a large spoon 1/2 a fork and knife are placed for each person. All these articles are arranged bottom side up. What's this? Someone seems to have miscounted , for there is an extra place. No, it is no mistake. That is the Christ-child's chair. If a stranger poor in spirit or body should come to them this day, they would be invited to share the supper and that is where they would sit.

Katherine cooks one main dish to follow the soup. Cabbage, really sauer kraut, sweetened with fresh cabbage, thickened with dried peas and mushrooms added. This with pierogi, filled with cheese and potato, and plenty of black rye bread and rye mush will be the main course. No meat is eaten at this Christmas Eve supper. A very large bowl is ready for the cabbage and Katherine will place it in the middle of the table.

Everything is about ready, but it is still early. Charlotte keeps running to the window. She is watching for the first star, for until it appears they may not eat. Katherine speaks to her,

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"Too soon, Charlotte, see sky too bright. Baby asleep. You and Frances come here, me tell you Christmas story."

They sit down by the window and Katherine tells them the story she often heard her mother tell. About the lost little boy who stumbled into a charcoal worker's cottage Christmas Eve. He was so cold and hungry and so badly frightened he could not speak. These kind people gave him a home. Altho he did not speak for many months he would sing. He sang so beautifully they called him Nightingale.

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He never remembered anything about himself. The children became excited when Katherine began telling how one Christmas Eve the charcoal worker had to deliver a special order of charcoal to the palace. He took the children along , even though it was a long trip , for they had never seen the palace. They were disappointed because everything looked dark and gloomy. This was because the Queen was very sad. She had lost her little boy, the Prince. one Christmas Eve. Nightingale sings in the court-yard. The Queen hears him and demands his presence. Katherine' had told the children this story before but the end never failed to delight them. The end where the little boy proved to be the lost Prince.

Just as Katherine finished the story they looked out the window and they there was the star, shing shining brightly overhead.

They gathered about the table and with great ceromony [Jan?] gives each one a wafer. They bow their heads while Jan says a prayer. Breaking the wafers they wish each other good luck and good health. While the wafer is eaten Katherine speaks to each child, commending them for their past goodness and suggesting improvements in character for next year's goal.

This ceromony over they eat with gusto. The barszcz tastes delicious after their fast. The girls remove the plates while Katherine brings in the steaming great bowl of cabbage and

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great platter of pierogi. Such appetites! Katherine is glad to see the food disappearing so rapidly. "Good? You like?" They answer as one, "Thanks. Very good!"

Having appeased their hunger they linger over the last course. This is fruit, pastries and a pudding made of noodles, honey and poppy seeds. Finally they can eat no more. Each now reaches under the tablecloth and pulls out a straw. At the same time they make a wish. If the straw is long as or has grain on it, the wish will come true!

After supper the presents are opened and they throw nuts at each other. This is greatly enjoyed, although few nuts find a mark.

At midnight a mass is held in church. The church is elaborately decorated, the service truly beautiful. The priests talk to them emphasizes tolerance and love towards all with the thought of the brotherhood of man throughout.

As Katherine says, "Me like Christmas. Fun, lots of fun. Everybody glad. Nice, love everybody. Good time!"

The next day household sleeps late. It is a day of rest. The left-overs are eaten. Everybody takes it easy.

But the next day, the day after Christmas, gayety begins and is kept up for two weeks. The young people skate and dance, plan sleigh rides, visit, Bands visit from home to home. The bands usually consist of accordions and bass viols.

During the Christmas season a play is given at the church, generally the Sunday following Christmas. This play takes the place of the traditional puppet show as given Christmas Eve in Poland. These plays centre around Herod and the slaying of the Innocents. Herod meaning to them the oppression of Russia.